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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 004544

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/18/2013

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKISH GENERAL STAFF OBJECTS TO EU REFORM PACKAGE  
AIMED AT RESTRICTING MILITARY'S POLITICAL POWER

REF: A. ANKARA 4319

[1](#)B. ANKARA 4367

[1](#)C. ANKARA 4499

[1](#)D. ANKARA 2521

(U) Classified by DCM Robert S. Deutsch. Reason: 1.5 (b)(d).

[1](#)1. (U) CNN Turk and NTV news channels report July 18 that the Turkish General Staff (TGS) leadership has voiced objections to the AK Government about its latest EU-related reform package. According to the reports, TGS opposes the reforms because: 1) they "restrict the jurisdiction of the National Security Council;" 2) the package would bring the military's budget under civilian (Court of Accounts) control; and 3) the proposals foresee holding NSC meetings every other month, vice the current monthly schedule.

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Commentary  
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[1](#)2. (C) In a telephone conversation with us after the news broke, AK Vice Chairman Firat was sparse in his comments, noting, however, that "we (the Government) are under pressure on a number of issues." In a recent, more private conversation reported ref A, Firat noted that TGS is attempting to use the controversy surrounding the July 4 brief detention of Turkish Special Forces (TSF) by U.S. troops in Iraq to fan nationalist flames and undercut the reform drive. Firat indicated that TGS Chief Ozkok is facing severe pressure from more hawkish elements in the military leadership who are trying to make it difficult for Ozkok to unseat them.

[1](#)3. (S) In a meeting with Polmilcouns July 16, Air Force Maj. Gen. Suphi Acar (J-5/Chief of Agreements), confirmed that the hard-line/soft-line split within the military is more pronounced since the July 4 detention of the TSF. Moreover, hard-liners long concerned about Ozkok's "accommodationist" stance vis-a-vis AK and P.M. Erdogan are even more agitated since the July 4 incident. Acar noted that he counts himself among those that feel that AK's true agenda is an eventual Islamic state (a view echoed to Polmilcouns July 15 by Air Force Lt. Gen. Turgut, Acar's boss and TGS Plans/Policy Chief). Ozkok, Acar said, must take a tougher line on AK's attempts to diminish the role of the military in the MGK and to take control of military spending. Similarly, given the widespread view of USG "support" for AK, many flag officers want Ozkok to take a more aggressive line with the Americans, too, and feel he capitulated on the Joint Statement. Acar agreed that the premier hard-liners are Army officers: TGS Deputy Chief Gen. Buyukanit and Army Gen. Yalman, NSC SecGen Gen. Kilinc, Aegean Army Chief Gen. Tolon, and Lt. Gen. Karabay (J-3/Ops Chief).

[1](#)4. (C) Cuneyt Ulsever, an influential columnist at the daily "Hurriyet," told us July 18 that the NSC issue represents a crucial test of AK and of Turkey's ability to continue the reform process. He noted that the military is particularly concerned with maintaining the NSC's ability to impose discipline on the civilians. The NSC SecGen oversees directly and indirectly hundreds of staffers -- including the ASAM think tank headed by Umit Ozdag, who Ulsever asserted is on the TGS payroll (note: which we have heard from numerous other commentators -- septel). "I know" for a fact, he asserted, that Ozkok himself is not/not driving the opposition to the reforms. Ulsever also noted that the opposition CHP is reversing course and opposing further reform. He related how CHP Deputy Kemal Dervis, one of the party's more reform-minded members, is now trying to convince journalists that AK "is seeking a Sharia state" even though Dervis knows better. (Note: in a July 16 meeting with us, Dervis expressed slight "reservations" about AK even as he applauded AK's reform push. end note.)

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What Will AK Do?  
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15. (S) Maj. Gen. Acar asserted that, facing pressure from within the military, Ozkok will insist, via his working relationship with Erdogan, on diluting these measures to the point that the military hard-liners would be satisfied. Acar expressed confidence that Ozkok would prevail, but admitted that should AK decline to back down, the TGS Chief would face "unbearable" pressure.

16. (C) Ulsever added that it would be "political suicide" for AK to take a step back now, given that it has extended Parliament's current session precisely to enact these reforms and to demonstrate to an overwhelmingly pro-reform public its seriousness of purpose. Dropping the reforms would also potentially wreak havoc with the GOT's EU timetable, and negatively effect the EU's report on Turkey due out this fall. Turkey's EU candidacy, Ulsever averred, depends on what AK does right now.

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Comment  
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17. (C) In the interest of helping Ozkok manage relations with his hard-liners, AK is showing signs of back-tracking on key reform proposals. As recently as July 11, F.M. Gul assured Ambassador that the Government is committed to transforming the NSC into a "real" advisory vice governing body (ref B). However, we note AK's willingness to temporize to limit the extent of confrontation. Recently they: 1) weakened a comprehensive "reintegration" proposal intended to bring PKK/KADEK militants down from the mountains (ref C); 2) shelved controversial higher education reform bills (septel); and 3) have shaded toward a more nationalist line on the July 4 incident. AK's approach could represent a tactical decision to wait for the outcome of the Aug 1-4 meeting of the Supreme Military Council (YAS), in the hope that Ozkok will have the wherewithal to ease out some of the military hard-liners. However, as so often in Turkey, biding one's time becomes an end in itself (ref D), and might have profound implications for Turkey's immediate and EU-related future.  
PEARSON